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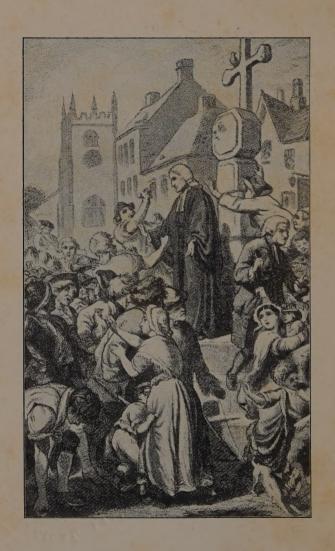
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THE HERO SERIES

JOHN WESLEY

His Courage and Ambition

BY

WILLIAM HENRY MEREDETH

Author of "The Real John Wesley" and "PILGRIMAGES TO METHODIST SHRINES."



- 14660

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John Wesley's Courage.

True courage always realizes danger, and always faces it, when it lies in the path of duty. It differs greatly from mere brute stolidity. It never seeks martyrdom. It implies intelligence, and is often attended with fear, and sometimes with trembling. Army officers say that the most courageous soldiers always see the danger ahead.

The early Methodists greatly needed to add to their faith courage, not only for their own spiritual edification, but in order to endure the bitter persecutions of those times. If ever, "with persecutions," applied to Christians, certainly it did to Methodist Christians of the eighteenth century.

The eighteenth century in England was a turbulent season. The masses, though not so dense as those of the nineteenth century, were more mercurial. It took but little to raise a

A striking instance of his courage occurs in his Georgia experiences. General Oglethorpe had undoubtedly been betrayed into evil by evil women. John Wesley, by their confession to him, knew this. Knowing it, he in some degree changed his behavior toward the general. Noticing this, the general said to him: "You observed yesterday the company of Indians that came into the town. The fellow that marched at their head, with his face marked with red paint, will shoot any man in this colony for a bottle of rum." Instead of being scared at this implied threat, John Wesley coolly took a book out of his pocket, and, leaving the room and the astonished general, slowly walked to his own house, reading as he walked. The next morning, as he was reading, with his back towards his window, the light became obstructed; turning, he saw the same Indian at the window. He went to the door, invited the Indian in, and gave him to cat of the best he had in the house. The Indian for a time surveyed Wesley from head to foot, "then throwing down his gun, he seized him in his arms, and kissed him with the greatest eagerness. He then ate heartily, and departed after another warm embrace, and with every appearance of the highest satisfaction." The general learned that it would take more than a great Indian to scare little John Wesley, the clergyman. Leaving for Europe soon after this, Oglethorpe, in the presence of others, charged Magistrate Causton, saying, "Causton, whatever you do, take heed, if you regard my favor, that you do not quarrel with Mr. Wesley."

Bull-baiting was a favorite pastime with the common herd in Wesley's day. Early in his evangelistic work in Bristol he visited the suburb of Pensford. In his journal for March 19, 1742, we find him there, preaching on a little common, which we once visited. Soon after he began, a hired rabble brought a bull. which they had been baiting, and set him loose in the crowd. Mr. Wesley was standing on a table preaching. The bull seemed uninclined to break up the meeting. Knowing better than its drivers, it refused to charge upon the crowd, or the table and its occupant, and went on either side, "while we quietly sang praise to God, and prayed for about an hour." The persecutors were not content until they had

dragged the tired bull up to the table. Wesley kindly patted the bull upon the head, as he steered it so that its blood would not drop on his clothes, "intending to go on, as soon as the hurry should be a little over. But the table falling down, some of our friends caught main their arms, and carried me away on their shoulders, while the rabble wreaked their vengeance on the table, which they tore bit from bit. We went a little way off, where I finished my discourse, without any noise or interruption."

Near Whitechapel, London, in that same year, 1742, some ruffians drove a herd of cattle among the congregation, and then threw a shower of stones, one of which struck Wesley between the eyes. "Wiping away the blood, he continued the service as if nothing had happened." Neither one bull nor much cattle could daunt the courage of this brave little preacher.

A favorite preaching-place of Wesley's in Cornwall was Gwennap, where is that wonderful amphitheater-like pit, at which Wesley often preached, and where services in his honor are now annually held. One day, while preaching there, two fellows rode like maniacs into the congregation, and began to lay hold of the people. Wesley began to sing, when one of the fellows cried, "Seize him! seize him! I say, seize the preacher for His Majesty's service!" Leaping off his horse he seized Wesley by the cassock, crying, "I take you to serve His Majesty!" Wesley coolly walked with him for about three-quarters of a mile, when the courage of the bumptious fellow forsook him, and he was glad to let the little minister go.

The very next day, at Falmouth, the rabble surrounded his stopping-place, crying: "Bring out the Canorum! Where is the Canorum?" Then, having broken open the outer door, they tore the inner door off its hinges. Wesley then coolly came out and asked them: "To which of you have I done any wrong? To you? To you? Or you?" Then he cried, "Neighbors, countrymen! Do you desire to hear me speak?" His courage won them, and they answered, "Yes, yes, he shall speak, he shall: no one shall hinder him!" The roughs charged the parish a little over nine shillings "for driving the Methodists out of the parish." The parish record remains to this day, as also

do the Methodists in that same parish, thanks largely to the courage of John Wesley, the Methodist preacher. But what splendid Methodists the Cornish people have made ever since that day!

An Irish mob had no more effect on him than did an English one. In 1760 he is in Carrick-upon-Shannon, preaching. A magistrate, with a mob and a drum, came upon the scene to silence him. Whilst the magistrate was haranguing the crowd, Wesley quickly moved his congregation into the garden, back of the house. They tried to force their way into the house; failing, they leaped over the gardenwall. Then, his honor bawled out to Wesley, "You shall not preach here to-day!" "Sir," said Wesley, with the utmost serenity, "I do n't intend it, for I have preached already." His honor then wreaked his vengeance on Wesley's hat, instead of upon his courageous head, which hat, says Wesley, "he beat and kicked most valiantly; but a gentleman rescued it out of his hands, and we rode quietly out of the town."

But the classic instance of great persecutions and of John Wesley's great courage in

them is found in his Journals, under date of October 20, 1743. Woe be to the man who attempts to boil down Wesley's concise Journals; therefore, we give the entire extract.

The place is Wednesbury, in Staffordshire, called the "Black Country." Certainly many black deeds were done there. But it is called the Black Country because it was and is still a region of collieries. The colliers there were inveterate rioters. The chronicles of the place include accounts of the "Church and King Riots of 1791," the labor disputes, or the "bread riots," as they were called; also the Sacheverell riots of 1715,—at least these three great outbreaks among this people occurred before the Wesley riots of 1763.

This was a good field for the Evangelist Wesley, whose rule was, "Go not only to those who want you, but to those who need you most." Certainly these brutal colliers needed the gospel more than many others. Lady Huntingdon seems to have first become acquainted with this people. In 1742, at her request, Charles Wesley visited Wednesbury, and was then unmolested. In October, 1743, John Wesley rode into town, and inquired for the home

of Francis Ward, his brother Charles's friend The man he inquired of was Ward himself, who at once took him to his home. Out-ofdoor work was soon planned and begun. Parson Egginton at first received Wesley kindly, thinking of him only as a flying visitor, whose work would depart with him. When he found that the work, though not the worker, would abide, he raised a most terrible persecution against Wesley and his followers. The homes of Methodists were looted, their furniture burned, their business-places demolished, and general terror was spread all around. Wesley's courage arose to the occasion. He bore away from there the marks of the Lord Tesus; but he had there done the work of Jesus, and such work as would abide and bless, not only England, but also America, as we shall presently see; but first let us hear John Wesley himself tell the story:

"I rode to Wednesbury. At twelve I preached, in a ground near the middle of the town, to a far larger congregation than was expected, on 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.' I believe every one present felt the power of God, and no creature

offered to molest us either coming or going; but the Lord fought for us, and we held our peace.

"I was writing at Francis Ward's in the afternoon, when the cry arose that 'the mob had beset the house.' We praved that God would disperse them; and it was so; one went this way, and another that; so that, in half an hour, not a man was left. I told our brethren. 'Now is the time for us to go;' but they pressed me exceedingly to stay. So, that I might not offend them, I sat down, though I foresaw what would follow. Before five the mob surrounded the house again, in greater numbers than ever. The cry of one and all was, 'Bring out the minister; we will have the minister!' I desired one to take their captain by the hand, and bring him into the house. After a few sentences interchanged between us, the lion was become a lamb. I desired him to go and bring one or two more of the most angry of his companions. He brought in two who were ready to swallow the ground with rage; but in two minutes they were as calm as he. I then bade them make way, that I might go out among the people. As soon as I was

in the midst of them, I called for a chair, and standing up, asked, 'What do you want with me?'

"Some said, 'We want you to go with us to the justice.' I replied, 'That I will do with all my heart.' I then spoke a few words, which God applied, so that they cried out with might and main, 'The gentleman is an honest gentleman, and we will spill our blood in his defense.' I asked, 'Shall we go to the justice to-night or in the morning?' Most of them cried, 'Tonight, to-night,' on which I went before, and two or three hundred followed, the rest returning whence they came.

"The night came on before we had walked a mile, together with heavy rain. However, on we went to Bentley Hall, two miles from Wednesbury. One or two ran before to tell Mr. Lane they had brought Mr. Wesley before his worship. Mr. Lane replied: 'What have I to do with Mr. Wesley? Go and carry him back again.' By this time the main body came up, and began knocking at the door. A servant told them Mr. Lane was in bed. His son followed, and asked, 'What is the matter?' One replied, 'Why, an't please you, they sing

psalms all day; nay, and make folks rise at five o'clock in the morning; and what would your worship advise us to do?' 'To go home,' said Mr. Lane, 'and be quiet.'

"Here they were at a full stop, till one advised to go to Justice Persehouse at Walsal. All agreed to this. So we hastened on, and about seven came to his house. But Mr. P. likewise sent word that he was in bed. Now they were at a stand again; but at last they all thought it the wisest course to make the best of their way home. About fifty of them undertook to convoy me; but we had not gone a hundred yards when the mob of Walsal came pouring in like a flood, and bore down all before them. The Darlaston mob made what defense they could; but they were weary as well as outnumbered, so that in a short time many being knocked down, the rest ran away and left me in their hands.

"To attempt speaking was vain, for the noise on every side was like the roaring of the sea; so they dragged me along till we came to the town, where, seeing the door of a large house open, I attempted to go in, but a man, catching me by the hair, pulled me back into

the middle of the mob. They made no more stop till they carried me through the main street from one end of the town to the other. I continued speaking all the time to those within hearing, feeling no pain or weariness. At the west end of the town, seeing a door half-open, I made toward it, and would have gone in, but a gentleman in the shop would not suffer me, saying they would 'pull the house down to the ground.' However, I stood at the door and asked, 'Are you willing to hear me speak?' Many cried out, 'No, no! knock his brains out! Down with him; kill him at once!' Others said, 'Nay, but we will hear him first.' I began asking, 'What evil have I done? Which of you all have I wronged in word or deed?' and continued speaking for above a quarter of an hour, till my voice suddenly failed. Then the floods began to lift up their voice again, many crying out, 'Bring him away; bring him away.'

"In the meantime my strength and my voice returned, and I broke out aloud into prayer; and now the man who just before headed the mob turned and said, 'Sir, I will spend my life for you; follow me, and not one

soul here shall touch a hair of your head!' Two or three of his fellows confirmed his words, and got close to me immediately; at the same time the gentleman in the shop cried out, 'For shame! for shame! Let him go.' An honest butcher, who was a little farther off, said it was a shame they should do thus, and pulled back four or five, one after another, who were running on the most fiercely. The people, then, as if it had been by common consent, fell back to the right and left, while those three or four men took me between them and carried me through them all. But on the bridge the mob rallied again; we therefore went on one side, over the mill-dam, and thence through the meadows, till a little before ten God brought me safe to Wednesbury, having lost only one flap of my waistcoat and a little skin from one of my hands.

"I never saw such a chain of providences before; so many convincing proofs that the hand of God is on every person and thing, and overruling all as it seemeth him good.

"From the beginning to the end I found the same presence of mind as if I had been sitting in my own study, but I took no thought of one moment before another; only once it came into my mind that, if they should throw me into the river, it would spoil the papers that were in my pocket; for myself, I did not doubt but I should swim across, having but a thin coat and a light pair of boots.

"The circumstances that follow, I thought, were particularly remarkable: I. That many endeavored to throw me down while we were going down hill on a slippery path to the town; as well judging, that if I was once on the ground, I should hardly rise any more; but I made no stumble at all, nor the least slip, until I was entirely out of their hands. 2. That, although many strove to get hold of my collar or clothes to put me down, they could not fasten at all; only one got fast hold of the flap of my waistcoat, which was soon left in his hand; the other flap, in the pocket of which was a banknote, was torn but half off. 3. That a lusty man, just behind, struck at me several times with a large oaken stick, with which, if he had struck me once on the back part of my head, it would have saved him all further trouble; but every time the blow was turned aside, I know not how, for I could not move

to the right hand or the left. 4. That another came rushing through the press, and, raising his arm to strike, on a sudden let it drop, and only stroked my head, saying, 'What soft hair he has!' 5. That I stopped exactly at the mayor's door, as if I had known it (which the mob doubtless thought I did), and found him standing in the shop, which gave the first check to the madness of the people. 6. That the very first men whose hearts were turned were the heroes of the town, the captains of the rabble on all occasions, one of them having been a prize-fighter at the beer-garden. 7. That from first to last I heard none of them give a reviling word or call me by any opprobrious name whatever; but the cry of one and all was, 'The preacher! The preacher! The parson! The minister!' 8. That no creature, at least within my hearing, laid anything to my charge, either true or false, having in the hurry quite forgot to provide themselves with an accusation of any kind. And, lastly, that they were as utterly at a loss what they should do with me, none proposing any determinate thing, only, 'Away with him; kill him at once.

"By how gentle degrees does God prepare us for his will! Two years ago a piece of brick grazed my shoulders. It was a year after that the stone struck me between the eyes. This month I received one blow, and this evening two, one before we came into the town, and one before we were gone out; but both were as nothing; for though one struck me on the breast with all his might, and the other on the mouth with such force that the blood gushed out immediately, I felt no pain from either of the blows, more than if they had touched me with a straw.

"It ought not to be forgotten that when the rest of the society made all haste to escape for their lives, four only would not stir, William Sitch, Edward Slater, John Griffiths, and Joan Parks; these kept with me, resolving to live or die together, and none of them received one blow but William Sitch, who held me by the arm from one end of the town to the other. He was then dragged away and knocked down, but he soon rose and got to me again. I afterward asked him what he expected when the mob came upon us. He said, "To die for Him who died for us;" and he felt no hurry or fear,

but calmly waited till God should require his soul of him.

"When I came back to Francis Ward's I found many of our brethren waiting upon God. Many, also, whom I had never seen before came to rejoice with us, and in the morning, as I rode through the town on my way to Nottingham, every one I met expressed such a cordial affection that I could scarcely believe what I saw and heard."

AN EXTRAORDINARY OFFICIAL DOCUMENT.

Mr. Wesley next quotes in full a remarkable document which had been previously issued by "His Majesty's Justices," adding that "they were the very justices to whose houses I was carried, and who severally refused to see me!

"STAFFORDSHIRE.

"To all High-Constables, Petty-Constables, and other of His Majesty's Peace-Officers within the said county, and particularly to the Constable of Tipton (near Walsal):

"Whereas, We, His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said county of Stafford, have received information that several disorderly persons, styling themselves, Methodist Preachers, go about raising routs and riots, to the great damage of His Majesty's liege people, and against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King:

"These are, in His Majesty's name, to command you and every one of you, within your respective districts, to make diligent search after the said Methodist Preachers, and to bring him or them before some of us, His said Majesty's Justices of the Peace, to be examined concerning their unlawful doings.

"Given under our hands and seals, this — day of October, 1743.

"(Signed,) J. Lane,
"W. Persehouse."

CHARLES WESLEY'S STATEMENT CONCERNING
HIS BROTHER'S PERIL.

"The Rev. Thomas Jackson, one of Mr. Wesley's biographers, says that, having made his escape from the Staffordshire rioters, Mr. Wesley went to Nottingham, where he was met by his brother, Mr. Charles Wesley, who had encountered similar treatment in his preaching visits in various parts of the coun-

try. Charles says in his own journal: 'My brother came delivered out of the mouth of the lion! His clothes were torn to tatters. He looked a soldier of Christ. The mob of Wednesbury, Darlaston, and Walsal were permitted to take and carry him about for several hours, with a full intent to murder him; but his work is not yet finished, or he had been now with the souls under the altar.'

"Mr. Charles Wesley, after a hurried interview with his brother at Nottingham, hastened to Wednesbury to encourage the suffering Methodist society. He found them still holding on to their work in a mind and spirit undaunted by their adversaries. He boldly preached twice among them, and received several new members into the society. He also admitted on trial 'the young man whose arm had been broken, and Munchin, the late captain of the mob. He has been constantly under the word,' added Charles, 'since he rescued my brother. I asked him what he thought of him "'Think of him?'" he responded. "'That he is a man of God; and God was on his side when so many of us could not kill one man l' " "

Thus again the blood of martyrs became the seed of the Church. Methodism has flourished in Wednesbury ever since. Before us, as we write, is a series of pictures of Methodist places of interest in Wednesbury; such as the horse-block, from which Wesley preached; the old Town Hall, in which Methodist meetings were held until 1760, when the first chapel was built; and also the present chapels and some of the worthies of Wednesbury Methodism.

Some of the results of Wednesbury Methodism come very near to us American Methodists. To the new chapel in 1761 came a young man to hear John Wesley for the first time. He was won to Christ and to Methodism. His name was Francis Asbury. He became the "John Wesley of America."

Later was converted there, Richard What-coat, who, in 1784, was ordained by John Wesley for work in America, and who later became the third in an honored line of bishops. From about four miles distant used to come to hear John Wesley "Brother Dartmouth," as he wished there to be called. He was Lord Dartmouth, One of our New England col-

leges bears his name. There, in Wednesbury, was born, in 1835, one who was destined to become an editor of our Western Christian Advocate, Dr. J. H. Bayliss. He was converted at Spring Head Chapel, Wednesbury, emigrated to America, and entered the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1857, and died at his post in 1880.

These are only a few of the great souls who were born from above, born of the Spirit, in the town of Wednesbury, which to this day is all alive with the Methodist spirit. Had John Wesley's courage failed him there in 1743, it is very improbable that we, in this bicentennial year of his birth, would be able to write of such results of persecution and courage as were displayed there in 1743.

John Wesley's Ambition.

Our title implies that John Wesley really was ambitious. In this we fully agree with his greatest literary biographer, Southey. But on the question of the nature and objects of his ambition we totally disagree with that poet laureate and literatus of the last century. Southey's native city was Bristol, which, from 1739 to 1791, was one of Wesley's three head Though Wesley was seventy-one years old when Southey was born, he still frequented Bristol, and there met the boy Southey before he left for Westminster School, London, at which Charles Wesley had been fitted for Oxford University. Thither Southey afterwards followed him. Though only seventeen years Wesley's contemporary, yet, being environed with the Methodist movement, Southey did not catch the genius of the movement, nor of its founder. He writes about "the ambitious stirrings" of Wesley. In his comparisons and contrasts between Charles and John Wesley he says: "Of Charles it has been said, by those who knew him best, that if there was ever a human being who disliked power, avoided pre-eminence, and shrunk from praise, it was he; whereas no conqueror or poet was ever more ambitious than John Wesley." (The Life of Wesley, Vol. II, p. 186, third edition.) Again on page 98 he says: "The love of power was a ruling passion in his mind." After enumerating Wesley's "rules of a helper," on p. 102, he writes: "Thus did Wesley, who had set so bad an example of obedience, exact it from his own followers as rigidly as the founder of a monastic order." These quotations suffice to give us John Wesley's motive, as misunderstood by his one-time Unitarian, but then Church of England, biographer. This great misunderstanding discolors Southey's otherwise beautiful picture of John Wesley's life. This false note has given the wrong key to many other writers on John Wesley.

Was John Wesley really ambitious? Be-

fore answering this question categorically, by saying Yes or No, let us remind ourselves that there are two kinds of ambition, as well as a vast multitude of objects. There is a holy, a Scriptural ambition, and an unholy and Christless ambition. The latter kind Tennyson puts among "the passions that make earth hell."

"Put down the passions that make earth hell! Down with ambition, avarice, pride, Jealousy, down! Cut off from the miud The bitter springs of anger and of fear."

The immortal William, referring to the same kind of ambition, makes Mark Antony say over the dead body of Cæsar:

"The noble Brutus Hath told you Cæsar was ambitious: If it were so, it were a grievous fault; And grievously hath Cæsar answered it."

We incline to substitute Southey for Brutus, and Wesley for Cæsar. Again, in the same sense, Wolsey addresses Cromwell:

"Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?
Love thyself last."

It is the Shakesperean kind of ambition which Southey ascribes to John Wesley. But, if ever mortal man "loved himself last," and was free from unholy ambition, John Wesley was that one.

Yet Wesley was a very ambitious man. He was ambitious in the Scriptural and Pauline sense of the term. Paul says of himself and of the Christians at Corinth: "We are ambitious to be well pleasing unto him." (2 Cor. v, 9.) He also urges the Thessalonians that they "be ambitious to be quiet and to do your own business." (I Thess. iv. II.) For himself he declares that he is "ambitious to preach the gospel" (Rom. xv, 20) to the raw heathen. Why didn't the revisers of 1881 give us this equivalent for the Greek word in the texts and not relegate it to the margins? John Wesley "studied," "labored," "strove," as they make Paul do; both Paul and Wesley were intensely ambitious in the truest meaning of the term. Does ambitio mean a going around or about? Surely the itinerants, Paul and Wesley, were both "Rounders."

Yes, John Wesley was intensely ambitious.

His ambition, like Paul's, was evangelistic, not egoistic. Paul said:

"I have fully preached the gospel of Christ; yea, being ambitious so to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundations: but as it is written,

"'They shall see, to whom no tidings of him came, And they who have not heard shall understand.'"

—Romans xx, 19-21, R. V.

Such holy ambition led Wesley to travel nearly two hundred and fifty thousand miles, and to preach forty thousand sermons, during the fifty years of his evangelistic ministry. Paul said, in 2 Cor. v, 9, "We are ambitious to be well pleasing unto Him." Whom did John Wesley seek to please? Not himself. Listen to him: "Newcastle, Wednesday, June 23d, 1779. I rested here. Lovely place, and lovely company! But I believe there is another world. Therefore I must arise and go hence." On Friday, June 4, 1790 (only eight months before his removal to the house above), he writes. "We reached Newcastle. In this and Kingswood House, were I to do my own will,

I should choose to spend the short remainder of my days. But it can not be; this is not my rest." Like Paul, and the common Master of both Paul and Wesley, he pleased not himself. Ease and self-indulgence would have said, "Stay in these spots you love so well, and do good in these neighborhoods;" but holy ambition said, "Go forth and please your Lord and Master."

Paul urged the Thessalonians (I Thess. iv, II) to "be ambitious to be quiet, and to do your own business." If he meant peaceful among themselves, and not meddlesome in other people's matters, this was the ambition John Wesley was constantly urging upon his people. Certainly Paul and Wesley were both ambitious men, and they also sought to inspire others with their own spirit.

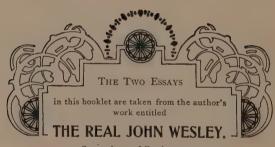
John Wesley could have shone as a fine, as well as a voluminous writer, but he purposely refrained from literary greatness, because he was ambitious for literary usefulness. His pen was always used as a lever to lift the common people up to personal goodness, and general usefulness to their fellow-men. Witness the four hundred and fifty-three different

issues of his press, all of which he either wrote, abridged, selected, or edited. Had he been ambitious for a personal following, he would never have insisted upon his people retaining their connection with the Church of England, from which he would not, to the very last, separate himself. He would have been more than happy, he was even ambitious to land all his people safely in the old Church, and to let the names of Methodist and Wesley be forgotten.

Our Epworth League motto, "Look up," is utterly meaningless if it is not intended to inspire each young Leaguer with an ambition to be some one, and to do something to lift some one up towards God and good. Of course, it implies aspiration, but not that alone; it also implies a holy ambition like that of Paul and of Wesley. It is true that Southey learned better, confessed his error, and promised to recant in his next edition. It is also true that his son declined to carry out his father's intention to alter the text of his otherwise excellent "Life of John Wesley." That brilliant essayist, Augustine Birrell, has discovered the true motive of John Wesley, which was also

the human source of his ambition. It was the saying of "a serious man" to John Wesley: "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember, you can not serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." The "Methodist movement" is a long and loud protest against solitary religion, and offers a wide field for the noble ambition of making companions for the heavenly life and the heavenly destiny.

3



See notice on following page.

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